

# Lessons Learned by IRC for Autism



## Bluffton-Harrison Elementary School is Making it Happen!



**WE ARE** Bluffton-Harrison Elementary School serves approximately 630 students in K-4 in Bluffton, Indiana. In addition, we have approximately 80 pre-school students. BHES is in the Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District located in Wells County.

**OUR STUDENTS & FAMILIES** BHES has a supportive PTO and school community. District-wide, 47.2% of the student population is eligible for free lunch/textbook fees.

**OUR TEACHERS** BHES has 42 certified teachers trained in evidence-based practices. Initial training was done in make-it, take-it style and then followed-up with hallway walks to check implementation. On-site professional development has been essential in the success of evidence-based practices at BHES.

**OUR PROMISING PRACTICE** Promising Practices at BHES include utilizing evidence-based practices as identified by the National Professional Development Center on Autism. After participating in training from Indiana Resource Center for Autism, it became obvious to the BHES staff that many of the strategies would be beneficial to all of our students, not just those with identified disabilities. Teachers have trained each other in multiple make-it/take-it sessions to ensure that all staff have the needed items and information to make positive changes in our school. Our staff utilizes video modeling, a variety of visual cues, sensory integration, and google forms for data collection and analysis. These practices are tools that are available to empower teachers to implement consistent and powerful interventions throughout our entire building. With the consistent supports in place, all students have a better understanding of school-wide and classroom expectations, data has been accurately collected and used to drive educational decisions, and the social/behavioral climate has improved with the availability of multiple interventional strategies.

**OUR STEPS** In 2013, a team of BHES educators got together, determined to meet needs of students. The team provided PD for BHES teachers called "Adding Tools to Your Toolbox" with focus areas of speech-language, visual supports, and fidget boxes. In the Fall of 2014, BHES partnered with Kristie Lofland, MS, CCC-A from the Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA). Kristie guided the team with on-site PD. At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year all teachers began to wear a visual pulley. Teacher pictures were posted outside the classroom and all classrooms used the 5 point emotional scale and voice level chart. In February and April 2016, the group provided PD called "Meeting Needs of Every Student One Step at a Time..." open to schools in Northeast Indiana. In Spring of 2016, BHES welcomed Pam Wright, Director of Special Education. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, Tier I of PBIS was implemented school wide by all staff, including custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers, showing an on-going commitment to meet needs of all students at BHES.

**IN OUR OWN WORDS** Our WINGS folder, shared out to the entire Bluffton-Harrison Elementary building, contains documents and material that benefit all staff! Erin Roush, a first grade general education teacher in our building, says, "I love having a tool like the WINGS folder available to use while figuring out how to create a calm and focused learning environment for my students. Tools like the First/Then chart and the incentive chart help make goals and expectations much easier for students to visualize and understand. I think the assumption is that most of these items are to be used for students with special needs, but I've found that everything I've used so far benefits most students in my classroom."

For more information about our school or corporation, email: [jmeitzler@bhmsd.org](mailto:jmeitzler@bhmsd.org) or visit the school website at: [www.bhmsd.org](http://www.bhmsd.org)